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2004

# The Co-operative Holidays Association and the cultural formation of countryside leisure practice.

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**Robert Snape**

**The Co-operative Holidays Association and the cultural formation of countryside leisure practice.**

Published in *Leisure Studies*, 23 (2) pp. 143-158, April 2004

**Abstract.**

The Co-operative Holidays Association was founded in 1893 by the Rev. T A. Leonard, a Congregationalist Minister in Colne, Lancashire. Its aim was to provide organised holidays in the countryside for working-class people as a moral and cultural alternative to the commercial seaside resorts. The Association was not simply a holiday club but a voluntary leisure organisation committed to the promotion of specific cultural values. Adopting the work of a number of nineteenth century cultural critics, notably Arnold, Ruskin and Morris, the Co-operative Holidays Association was grounded upon the concept of the countryside as not only a physical but also a cultural and spiritual alternative to the city and industrial materialism. Its holidays thus sought to recreate the primitive communal lifestyle idealised in Romantic interpretations of pre-industrial pastoral society and to educate participants in the cultural interpretation of the countryside and landscape. Its antithetical approach to conspicuous consumption and material comfort became a focus of conflict as the proportion of middle-class members increased after the turn of the century and led to the formation of a schism in 1912.

This paper assesses the significance of the Co-operative Holidays Association to the development and consolidation of a dominant cultural mode of countryside leisure practice and also explores the extent to which its self-identity was formed by taste and cultural values rather than social class.

**Introduction**

Ever since Wordsworth (1977) changed the popular imagination of Nature, the issue of leisure access to the countryside has been one of continuous debate (Shoard 1997, 1999; Stephenson, 1989). At the core of this debate has been the question of what forms of leisure activity seem proper to the post-Romantic cultural identity of the countryside. Wordsworth himself clearly delineated the inter-relationship between access and activity in his evocative warning of the "rash assault" on the Lake District by rail-borne excursionists which, he feared, would result in wrestling matches, horse races and extended drunkenness on the shores of Windermere (Ousby, 1990). The shift in perceptions of the rural precipitated by Romanticism developed throughout the nineteenth century into a wider process of cultural construction in which the idealised rural imagery of the Lakes poets, together with the liberal critique of industrialism spearheaded by John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, evolved into a re-interpretation of the countryside as the authentic, unadulterated England (Aitchison *et al.*, 2000; Cosgrove, 1979; Howkins, 1986; Ousby, 1990; Towner, 1996; Wiener, 1981), a pre-

industrial pastoral haven in which, as Octavia Hill (1877) expressed it, the silence of the heather-clad hills offered a spiritual counter-balance to the strains of urban existence.

This imagery postulated a leisure usage sympathetic to the countryside's new cultural identity, and in the twentieth century exercised a powerful influence on the development of a philosophy of countryside leisure practice. Leisure was to be appraised in terms of not only its physical but also its cultural impact on the environment, thus Joad's (1938) aversion to "tents in meadows and girls in pyjamas dancing beside them to the strains of the gramophone" echoed Wordsworth's fears in its perception of urban leisure culture as a threat to the sanctity of the countryside. This theme informed the philosophical basis of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which acknowledged the status of the countryside as a recreational space and, through its emphasis on conservation, conveyed a tacit assumption of leisure forms in keeping with the cultural symbolism of the landscape. The Edwards Report (1991) re-affirmed this approach in advocating not only the facilitation but the promotion of the quiet enjoyment of the countryside, and as Caffyn & Prosser (1998) have shown, concepts of peace and quiet have become dominant aspects of strategic management in National Parks. The controversies surrounding activities which transgress this code, such as water-skiing on Lake Windermere and mountain biking, are simply the latest examples of an enduring conflict of interests and values in countryside leisure practice (Brodie, 2000; Ellison, 2000; Llewellyn, 2002; Sidaway, 1998). In the light of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' recent consideration of the accommodation of such activities in the National Parks this debate seems set to continue for some time (Defra, 2002).

Historically, however, the production and promotion of leisure activity proper to the countryside has been the province not primarily of politicians or planners but of leisure actors, and the evolution of a framework of leisure practice in harmony with the countryside's cultural identity owes as much to voluntary endeavour, particularly that of the pioneer organisations of ramblers and cyclists of the late nineteenth century (Taylor, 1997). The growth in the popularity of rambling in this period reflected the emerging identity of the

countryside as a democratically accessible leisure space and as a place for personal development and spiritual renewal. Improved means of transport and a burgeoning popular interest in natural history, geological science and literature combined to form an amorphous leisure constituency, particularly in the north of England, to whom the countryside offered a combination of fresh air, physical activity and informal self-education. This surge of interest led to the founding of the Cyclists' Touring Club in 1878, the Manchester YMCA Rambling Club in 1880, the Polytechnic Rambling Club in 1885 and the London Federation of Rambling Clubs in 1901, not only reflecting Rawnsley's (1886) observation that "Young England seems more and more determined to use its legs in holiday time" but also indicating that far from being solitary activities, walking and cycling were essentially collective leisure pursuits, best facilitated through voluntary association and self-help organisation. However, whereas a day excursion to the countryside was a leisure experience available to virtually everyone, rural holidays were in the main restricted to the higher social classes because of the scarcity of affordable accommodation (Nicholson, 1995), and working-class urban dwellers continued to have little if any holiday alternative to the commercial seaside resorts.

The Co-operative Holidays Association [CHA] was founded in the final decade of the nineteenth century to make possible working-class participation in holidays in the countryside by resolving the problem of lack of accommodation. It provided organised holidays with affordable hospitality and it was, as Taylor states, (1997) one of the major agents in the growth of the outdoor movement in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Its principal interest in a leisure studies context lies in its contribution to the formulation of an approach to countryside leisure practice which reflected contemporary cultural and demographic patterns and informed the philosophical foundations of the access legislation of the mid-twentieth century.

### **The emergence of the Co-operative Holidays Association**

By the late nineteenth century rambling was firmly established as a popular recreation, particularly in north east Lancashire where rambling clubs commonly operated within the leisure programmes of non-conformist churches. The origins of the CHA lie within this

setting, its rationale being first outlined in 1891 in a sermon on the philosophy of holiday making by T.A. Leonard (1891), a Congregationalist minister in Colne, in which the dissipations and frivolities of Blackpool and other popular seaside resorts were contrasted with the restorative calm of a holiday in the countryside. Subsequently Leonard organised a walking holiday in the Lake District for 32 male members of his church's Social Guild Walking Club, following this with a further holiday "on tramp" in the next year. The contrast between these holidays and those to which young working-class men were accustomed could hardly have been more distinct as:

in the long day-tramps over the hills and moors many a young fellow learned for the first time the real wholesome pleasure of a mountain holiday, and found that such a holiday was not only healthier, but less expensive than the usual 'Blackpool bust'. (Paton, 1914, p.229)

The evolution of this local arrangement into a national holiday movement was effected through John Brown Paton, a prominent Congregationalist and social reformer and Leonard's former tutor, who had founded the National Home Reading Union in 1889 to improve the standard of working-class leisure reading. The concept of the Union had been inspired by the Chautauqua movement in North America (Fitch, 1888; Morrison, 1974), which organised geographically dispersed reading circles to continue the educational work of its summer camps through the winter months. Intending that the National Home Reading Union would operate upon a similar model, Paton launched it with a summer assembly at Blackpool, a venue selected for its concentration of working-class holiday makers and its symbolic representation of the cheap and sensational leisure forms the Union sought to displace (Snape, 2002). However, repeated attempts to recruit working-class holiday makers failed, and Paton, aware of Leonard's more successful venture, invited him to expand his walking holidays on a national basis by working in co-operation with the National Home Reading Union (Paton, 1914). The embryonic Co-operative Holidays Association was subsequently formed under the auspices of the Union with Leonard as Secretary, John Brown Paton as President and John Lewis Paton, his son, as Treasurer. Members of the CHA were automatically enrolled in the Union, which in turn inaugurated an annual reading course of books on nature and rural interests for the benefit of CHA-based reading circles. Thus grounded upon a combination of non-conformist morality and the social and

educational aims of the National Home Reading Union, the CHA inherited an ideological perspective that was fundamentally important not only to its cultural identity but also to its promotion of a mode of leisure practice that assumed a degree of education and cultural competence, a desire for self-improvement and a Christian morality as prerequisites to a proper enjoyment of the countryside.

The CHA was a voluntary leisure association with a primary commitment to philosophical aims. Its objectives were to provide recreative and educational holidays by offering reasonably priced accommodation and to promote the intellectual and social interests of its holiday groups (CHA, 1897). It was not, for example, prominent in contemporary land access campaigns but focused instead upon promoting a framework of leisure practice in keeping with the cultural associations of the countryside. Its holidays, as the *Colne Times* (1893) described them, would be

among the mountains and beautiful and interesting scenery of the Lake district; be periods of really healthy bodily recreation and bodily and mental enjoyment, and being conducted on the co-operative plan, be comparatively inexpensive.

A typical holiday was of one week's duration and comprised non-optional daily rambles, not uncommonly eighteen to twenty miles in length (Tarn, 1952). Most importantly these were accompanied by a lecturer, often provided through the National Home Reading Union, who gave wayside talks on the natural history and literary associations of the area (Leonard, 1936). Walking was widely considered superior to cycling because its slower pace encouraged a reflective appreciation of one's surroundings and thus a cultural contextualisation of the countryside traversed. There was, as a popular guidebook of the period noted (Burnett, 1889), an expanding class of people who wished to acquire a knowledge of the historical and artistic connections of the areas through which they rambled, and as the author of a much-reprinted walking guide observed:

We are of the opinion that for a walk to be thoroughly enjoyable there should be some object, other than the desire to cover a certain distance, to engage the mind or charm the fancy ...we purpose on our peregrinations to pick up as we go along any bit of folk-lore, any inconsiderable trifle of history, any forgotten incident which long ago absorbed the mind of a former generation and present it to the reader at the time and place when and where it will be most likely to interest him. (Johnson, 1896)

Thus aided by the lecturer, a CHA ramble entailed not simply a walk as physical exercise, though that was important, but an interpretative relationship with the landscape and its features.

The holiday regime was one of rigour and simplicity. Days were spent on the fells and evenings were given to lectures, recitals, country dancing, impromptu concerts and other wholesome entertainments. Alcohol was forbidden and lights out was at 10.30 p.m. The following entry from the diary of a member conveys some impression of the blend of walking, morality and organised leisure activity that characterised a CHA holiday:

*Monday.* Bell rang at 7.45. Breakfast 8.30. Prayers. Rambling about until 1 o'clock. After dinner rambling until 5 o'clock, after tea rambling about until 8.30. After went to recreation room, grand entertainment, fine songs with dramatic performances entitled "Cottage" in three acts. Screams of laughter, when our sides ached through laughing until 10 o'clock.

*Tuesday.* Bell rang at 7.45. Breakfast at 8.30, prayers. Rambling about until 1 o'clock. Party broke up, those who could walk well went for a long ramble until about 5 o'clock. After tea ramble through the woods, finest I ever saw, others played tennis until supper time. After supper prayers. Grand entertainment in recreation room with band of Scotch bag-pipers dancing which was much enjoyed by all until 10 o'clock bedtime. A fine day all through. (Rickets, 1910, pp.18-20)

Paton's expectation that the CHA would be popular amongst Pleasant Sunday Afternoon associations, Bible Classes and Sunday Schools was, unsurprisingly given its Congregationalist connections, fulfilled (Paton, 1914), though its appeal was by no means restricted to denominational parties. Initially empty cottages were used for accommodation and school halls for communal activities, though from 1896 onwards the Association acquired a number of its own centres throughout the British Isles. Its membership expanded from 8,400 in 1905 to over 30,000 by 1914, by when it had established over twenty centres, a small number of which were on mainland Europe. By the First World War the CHA had become more secular in nature, though a moral and sober ethos remained at its ideological core.

### **The CHA and the cultural construction of the countryside as a leisure space**

The CHA was a manifestation not only of Congregationalist leisure morality but also of an anti-industrial, and to a large degree anti-urban, cultural trend that had been gathering

momentum since the mid-nineteenth century. The positioning of the country as an 'other' to the town was not a new concept – Hazlitt (1822) had declared that he went into the country to forget the town and all that was in it, while Williams (1975) has traced the roots of the dichotomy between a pastoral Eden and an urban fall from grace to the literature of ancient Greece – but by the closing decades of the nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation had not only changed the way the majority of people lived and worked but had fundamentally altered man's relationship with the countryside. Martin Wiener (1981) has suggested that the late nineteenth century English countryside, having to a large degree lost its economic and political significance, became “empty and available for use as an integrating cultural symbol”, and that as agriculture declined, the imaginative representation of the countryside as a rural idyll became a dominant theme as the retreat from urban industrialism and materialism, in both a metaphorical and a physical sense, evolved into an identifiable cultural trend. This trend gave form to numerous experimental projects in rural communal living, several of which, such as those formed by Ruskin at St. George's Farm near Sheffield and by Edward Carpenter at Millthorpe, also near Sheffield, became widely known (Batchelor, 2000; Marsh, 1982). The CHA, it is suggested, was an expression, within a leisure context, of this contemporary yearning for the pastoral and the primitive. However, its cultural genealogy was complex and drew extensively on contemporary social and political thought. Leonard was a Christian socialist and a disciple of Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin, both of whom he quoted in sermons (*Colne Times*, 1892). Arnold's concept of culture as a counter-offensive to materialism and mechanical civilisation (Arnold, 1903) informed Leonard's conceptualisation of leisure as the pursuit of an inward condition of the mind and spirit, the function of its external form being to serve this primary defining element. Ruskin's analysis of industrial society was equally searching in its championing of pre-industrial values and modes of work (Ruskin, 1907). Their critique of industrialism's obsession with material progress at the expense of quality of life gave impetus to the CHA's negation of the economic and social structures of urban capitalism and its attempt to replicate a pastoral mode of existence in which complexity was superseded by simplicity and competition was replaced by co-operation. The choice of the countryside as the location for



Leonard's project in communal leisure was highly symbolic. Not only did it affirm a mode of leisure grounded upon an appreciation of nature and the pastoral as inherently superior to the hedonism of urban leisure culture but it also reflected a contemporary view of the rural as the locus for a post-industrial socialist utopia (Morris 1915; 1962). The idealised pastoral vision of Ruskin and Morris and the rural imagery of the Lakes poets were the foundations for the CHA's guiding principles of fellowship and commonwealth and the model for its holidays. This influence is readily observable in, for example, the adoption of the term 'guest house' from the fictional guest house in Morris' *News from Nowhere* (Morris, 1962), the Association's motto "Joy in widest commonalty spread" (Wordsworth, 1969) and the title of its journal, *Comradeship*. This blend of socialism with the romantic construct of the pastoral endowed the CHA with a unique leisure ideology and appeal. It was not simply a holiday organisation, but was, as Leonard (c.1900) stated, one with

a definite ethical mission to fulfil – namely the cultivation of character, and we seek to achieve this at a season when men and women are most susceptible to better influences... Comradeship, simplicity, reverence may perhaps be regarded as the watchwords of our movement.

The CHA's collective form of holiday offered an opportunity to recreate, even if only for a week, Wordsworth's (1977) vision of a pre-industrial mountain republic and to live in a utopian socialist microcosm. As one observer noted, each party was a commune to itself, with every class of society represented from the mechanic to the university professor (*Young Oxford*, 1897). In pursuit of the communal ideal, the conventions of a holiday boarding house were discarded and class differences suspended. Tasks such as boot cleaning and washing up were shared between all guests who, as one observer recalled, lived happily under the same roof as brothers and sisters (Leonard, 1905). Few records of CHA holiday groups are available, but those that do remain suggest that, at least in its first decade, the Association developed a reasonably wide appeal. One party, for example, included teachers, shop assistants, warehousemen and weavers (*Echoes*, c.1900), whilst another comprised a cotton mill holiday club, clerks, a carpenter, a dressmaker and two university lecturers, and it was, as John Lewis Paton observed, "the sense of altogetherness that made the difference" (Paton, 1936a). The CHA's communal ideal was further emphasised through its insistence that domestic helpers at the centres be treated as equals and encouraged to join in leisure

activities with the guests in off-duty periods. However, although in principle social class was not a barrier to participation, the ability of guests to conform to social manners remained an influential consideration in practice. For example, while free holidays were provided, through donations from members, for those who could not afford to join the CHA, Leonard (1908) nevertheless excluded from these “persons of intemperate, uncleanly or unpleasant habits”. A further scheme provided assisted holidays to people of “straightened circumstances ... folks of refined taste and educational habits” who did not belong to the class ordinarily catered for by the free holidays (Leonard, 1907a), also suggesting that although the CHA sought to transcend class boundaries, it did so within its own hegemonic construct of social behaviour and taste.

The suspension of class differences necessitated the minimisation of indicators of social standing, and luxury and display were as strongly condemned as idleness and vulgarity. The CHA ideal was the antithesis of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1994), and the issue of ostentatious clothing and other material symbols of pecuniary advantage became increasingly contentious as the proportion of middle-class guests expanded after the turn of the century. Leonard’s belief that excesses of fashion were incompatible with the philosophy of the simple life chimed with the view promulgated by the rational dress movement of the period, and female members were thus advised that “dressy” clothes for Sunday would not be necessary as they suggested a “town” conventionality (CHA 1912). As Leonard reminded the Association:

We are plain folk and are expected to dress suitably and simply, so that poorer members are not made to feel out of place. While welcoming all and sundry who join us, we stipulate that there shall be no divisiveness or putting on of ‘side’ by those who happen to be better off than others. (Leonard, 1904, pp.175-176)

Indeed, any hint of an appeal for a relaxation of the Spartan standards was stoutly rebutted, and requests for hot baths to replace the custom of washing in streams, or for cups of tea on rambles in place of cold water were rejected as signs of a dilution of the Association’s core values and a potential fissure in its ideological unity. The combination of simplicity in living standards and moral integrity in leisure activity was, in Leonard’s view, crucial to the success of the CHA:

It would be a fatal policy for the Association to lower its standard of strenuousness and become a movement for merely running boarding houses, driving excursions and afternoon strolls mixed up with pleasant sensibilities. We should cease to justify our existence. Your Committee believe that it is the energetic open-air life of our centres that keeps our movement healthy, and that to diminish this will tend to the lowering of the tone of our fellowship...We recognize the necessity for rest and quiet, and therefore put in a plea that members should not clamour for exciting evenings after long days on the tramp and count a local Secretary or hostess an unprofitable person if they do not organize elaborate entertainments every evening. (Leonard, 1907b, p.174)

The maintenance of standards of functionality in dress and simplicity in lifestyle depended upon a degree of self-discipline and behaviour that was not easily accommodated within expectations of holiday freedom. The rigorous routine occasionally provoked complaints. One correspondent, for example, felt that CHA officials too easily assumed the role of “genial policemen” (*Comradeship*, 1908), while another criticised the regimented style of the rambles (*Comradeship*, 1909). Complaints such as these, however, were rebuffed by other members for whom the Association’s behavioural codes suggested innate good taste and were a major element in its appeal. In the main, discipline was effected not through formal procedures but through a shared recognition of boundaries of taste and behaviour. This understanding served as a badge of membership and engendered a sense of self-identity as “CHA folk”.

Central to the cultural meaning of the countryside and its leisure use was a symbolic interpretation of the landscape. To an extent, this mode of visualising the landscape was implicit in the CHA’s Christian morality as wayside breaks provided opportunities for sermons and prayers in communion with God’s creation; Paton (1914) himself had noted how clear skies and heather-clad moors enhanced the outdoor services and sermons with which the early rambles were liberally sprinkled. Though non-conformist in origin the religious dimension of the countryside to the CHA came to embrace a wider spiritual relationship with the landscape and Nature that was largely inspired by Ruskin. Indeed, the CHA’s ideological outlook clearly reflected Ruskin’s contrast of the materialistic nature of urban leisure and the potential of the countryside as an alternative leisure space:

The delights of horse-racing and hunting, of assemblies in the night instead of the day, of costly and wearisome music, of costly and burdensome dress, of chagrined contention for place or power, or wealth, or the eyes of the multitude; and all the endless occupations without purpose and idleness

without rest, of our vulgar world, are not, it seems to me, enjoyments we need to be ambitious to communicate. And all real and wholesome enjoyments possible to man have been just as possible to him since first he was made of the earth, as they are now; and they are possible to him chiefly in peace. To watch the corn grow and the blossoms set, to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to pray, - these are that make men happy; they have always had the power of doing these; they never *will* have the power to do more. The world's prosperity or adversity depends on our knowing or teaching these few things: but upon iron, or glass, or electricity, or steam, in no wise. (Ruskin, 1856, p.310)

Ruskin's theme of the spirituality of the landscape (the quotation above is taken from a chapter revealingly titled "The moral of landscape") was deeply embedded within the CHA from its earliest days when, as Leonard (1936) recalled, the first parties were addressed by Canon Rawnsley who introduced them to the poetry of Wordsworth and the teachings of Ruskin and taught them to see "the wonder and beauty of the countryside". This spiritual element was further emphasised through music, in particular the singing of hymns on rambles. This, it was suggested, gave a mountainside an "uplift" that was never forgotten (Leonard, 1936), and the CHA songbook became not only an integral element of the holiday but was taken home and used in other social contexts (Tarn, 1952). As the CHA's profile acquired a more secular aspect, so did the range of approved songs, though within limits of what was deemed to be consistent with reverence for the landscape and Nature. The second CHA songbook (1905) included a higher proportion of secular songs than did the first edition of 1895, its contents being described as "good simple catchy music set to wholesome words of the nature-loving comradeship order" (NHRU, 1903). It was of course necessary to reconcile the practice of singing *en route* with quiet enjoyment and unobtrusiveness, and therefore boundaries were imposed not only upon what was sung but upon how it was sung. Rawnsley (1903) himself had pointed out that if not properly controlled the "sing-song nuisance" detracted from the spirituality of the outdoors, and, as always, it was Leonard (1936) who set the tone the CHA was to adopt in dismissing popular songs such as *McNamara's Band* and promoting instead hymns, traditional ballads and folk songs.

### **The CHA's constituency**

The CHA was not homogenous in its social constitution, but comprised elements of the middle class, the *petit bourgeoisie* and the higher stratum of the working class, a

combination in which identity was formed around values of respectability and taste rather than social class (Harris, 1994). The growth of the CHA was aided by the spread of higher education and the changing status of women. It emerged at a time when, as Hobsbawm (1987) observes, there was a significant alteration in the economic and social expectations of women. This change was impelled by a ten-fold increase between 1881 and 1911 in the number of women employed in central and local government and by a concurrent expansion of the teaching profession, itself largely facilitated through the availability of newly educated women teachers. Men too were finding new forms of non-manual employment as clerks and office workers in an increasingly bureaucratized world. To this inchoate class of young professional workers, female teachers and subaltern clerks the CHA, which did not welcome children, offered an organised, active and affordable holiday that was particularly suited to educated single people. The Association was noted for its absence of traditional English reserve, and the following account of a young man's first CHA holiday at Abbey House, the Whitby centre, indicates the importance of this to the Association's popularity:

I thought of what I had missed in those solitary holidays of previous years. We were a varied party. Most of us came from the North. Some from the Midlands. A few from the South. Our varied experience of life added a great deal to our enjoyment of each other's company ... To a bachelor like myself, experienced in the loneliness of lodgings, the life at Abbey House was an eye-opener. I was no longer a lodger, I was a guest in a delightful old country house... There was no host whose hospitality we were enjoying and to whom deference was due on that account, and because of his great social position. Besides, we were a far superior party to your usual country house party, with its class distinctions, its subservience to wealth, its craving punctilio and all the rest of its snobbish abominations. We were a jolly crowd. Even I developed geniality at the call of the CHA. No country house party for me, thank you, while the CHA flourishes. This was one of the most lasting impressions the CHA made on me. (Ackroyd, 1910, pp.23-25)

Women formed a large proportion of the CHA's membership. The financially independent new woman of the late nineteenth century sought greater freedom of movement, travelled unaccompanied, challenged social norms, and found in the CHA an ideal holiday milieu. It not only pioneered equality of opportunity by allowing women to join, but also offered opportunities for the intermingling of the sexes, most importantly for women, within a context of respectability. Being more expensive than, for example, the holidays organised by the Young Women's Christian Association which, in 1904, cost seven shillings per week in

contrast to the CHA's twenty two shillings and sixpence (*People's Friend*, 1904), the CHA's holidays appear to have been priced at a level beyond the means of a considerable proportion of the working population. Nevertheless, they offered to the emergent class of clerks and teachers a greater probability of meeting people with similar interests and expectations, for it was, as a female teacher and CHA member remarked, all too common to discover on seaside holidays that fellow lodgers were not the right "sort" (Paton, 1936a). The difficulties facing women who wished to take a holiday independently were real, and as a correspondent to the *Manchester City News* (1909) observed, the question of how to make the best use of a holiday was a perplexing problem to the business girl who wanted to enjoy herself unfettered by the constrictions and "needless conventionality" of the seaside hotel. The freedom and companionship of the CHA's holidays provided an appealing solution to this question by encouraging women to wear walking boots, short woollen skirts and woollen underwear, to leave jewellery at home, and to join in a wide range of mixed-gender activities. To the young adults of the Victorian-Edwardian era, holiday practice of this nature represented a daring breach of convention, graphically described in a further holiday reminiscence:

I think I can best describe it [the CHA] by the name of Bohemia for all its inhabitants lived the life of the free. All the ladies pinned up their skirts, wore stout-soled boots, carried sticks, went without headgear or wore men's caps. One woman (I hardly like to call her lady) wore men's leather leggings, but then she was a suffragette. The men are fairly prim, contenting themselves by wearing soft collars and going about very often without coats or waistcoats.... a more heterodox wild crew I never saw. This wild retreat is known to the world as the [CHA] Guest House, Newlands Vale, Keswick.  
(CHA, 1909)

The CHA's acceptance of women on a basis of equality reflected its communal ideology and was underpinned by a strong feminist axis in its management which included women such as Fanny Pringle (*Comradeship*, 1912) and Emily Smith (Paton, 1936b), both of whom were active in the women's suffrage movement. Its enthusiasm for increased freedom for women did not, however, extend to greater sexual liberty, and the implicit moral dangers of mixed groups of single people were assiduously addressed. Sleeping outdoors by unmarried members was forbidden outright (CHA, 1897), and flirting was roundly condemned. Nevertheless, the function of the CHA as a meeting ground for young people of both sexes

was a factor in its appeal that was acknowledged by members if not by the Association's managers, and the several personal accounts of CHA holiday romances that led to marriage justify its sobriquet of the Catch a Husband Association.

The indeterminate social composition of the CHA was not necessarily unusual, for as Taylor (1997) notes, walking tended not to be moulded by rigid social formations but displayed a tendency to bring together people of differing social classes through mutual interest. However, taste and behaviour were also powerful factors in the formation of the CHA's cultural identity and served to distinguish it from the contemporary Clarion groups which also opened new opportunities of collective access to countryside leisure, promoted equality of status for women and were grounded upon a socialist ideology. The waggery and irreverence of the Clarion groups were, for example, at odds with the sober and polite forms of conduct that characterised the CHA, and the public house beer-fuelled singing parties that formed a social mainstay of the Clarion movement (Pye, 1995) would have been unthinkable in a CHA context. Although both organisations were formed with socialist principles, the Clarion groups were aggressively propagandist (Yeo, 1977; Moncrieff, 1990) and exploited the leisure use of the countryside as a vehicle for the political contest of land access (Byne and Sutton, 1966), unlike the CHA which, though committed in principle to access, showed little enthusiasm for organised campaigns or trespasses. The Blatchford-inspired militaristic nationalism which informed the Clarion approach (Prynn, 1976) marked a further difference to the CHA, which was essentially internationalist and, in the years preceding the First World War, overtly pacifist in tone. In contrast to the Clarion's jingoism it habitually arranged German exchange visits almost until the outbreak of the First World War – an undertaking facilitated through the popularity of rambling and the emergence of the *wandervogel* in Germany in the pre-war decade (Schulze, 1998) – and excised from its songbook songs with bellicose overtones.

The viability of the CHA as a voluntary leisure association as distinct from a holiday club depended not only, as stated above, on its shared values and sense of identity, but upon the ability of members to meet regularly beyond the annual holiday. This was effected through

the establishment of local groups to arrange weekend rambles and excursions as miniature replicas of the holiday tramps. Often this extended to the organisation of other forms of collective leisure activity; the Leeds CHA Rambling Club, for example, retained its links with the National Home Reading Union by forming a Union circle which met throughout the winter while the Manchester CHA club, formed in 1902, arranged not only rambles but theatre trips and visits to places of cultural interest (Manchester Rambling Club, 1902). CHA Clubs were heavily concentrated in the north of England; 22 of the 36 New Year Reunions announced in December 1905 were in Lancashire or Yorkshire (NHRU, 1905), and although some clubs were connected to non-conformist churches, many were organised independently of institutional affiliation. The Huddersfield CHA Rambling and Reading Club, for example, aimed not only to devise an annual winter schedule of rambles but to “provide for the healthy enjoyment of leisure” by encouraging the study of books, plays and social and scientific subjects” (Huddersfield CHA, 1911). It operated a reading circle throughout each winter which regularly attracted an attendance of thirty members, in addition to a drama club, and rented its own cottage on the outskirts of the town at which members could spend a weekend in rural surroundings.

## **Conclusion**

By 1910 several CHA centres had been established on mainland Europe and as the Association’s holidays became physically less arduous, a gradual but definite retreat from simplicity and strenuousness was clearly in evidence. As a result Leonard resigned in 1912, claiming that

the Association has drifted into extravagance in its selection of furnishings and fittings. Pile carpets are not hygienic ... but the chief objection to them is that they create a higher standard of comfort than the professed simple ways of the CHA warrant; besides helping to create a style that attracts just the class of person the CHA does not cater for, and whose coming is likely to give trouble to the movement.... The policy of ‘doing things thoroughly’ in an unnecessary sense and persisting in demanding the standard of comfort and convenience of a middle-class house was not in vogue when the General Secretary [i.e. Leonard himself] was mainly responsible for creating the Newlands centre, and the probable continuance of this policy in years to come, will prove an effectual hindrance to the opening of really cheap centres in out of the way places, with all the opportunities they afford for wholesome, natural, fraternal living. (Leonard, 1912)



Leonard subsequently founded the Holiday Fellowship in a renewed effort to establish holidays that would be genuinely working class in appeal and composition. The two organisations, though independent, worked harmoniously and the CHA continued to provide organised countryside holidays until well into the second half of the twentieth century. Whilst it must be recognised that, as with so many nineteenth century leisure reform movements, the CHA eventually served the middle classes rather more effectively than the working classes for whom it was originally intended, this should not obscure its contribution to the democratisation of the countryside as a leisure space and to the cultural formation of modern countryside leisure practice. The extent of the influence of the CHA on the development of countryside leisure, and in particular upon rambling, is amply illustrated in the range of organisations represented at Leonard's eightieth birthday celebrations. These included the Youth Hostels Association, the Workers' Travel Association, International Tramping Tours, the Ramblers' Association, the Pennine Way, the National Trust and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CHA, 1944), all of which owed their existence in some degree to the example set by Leonard and the Association and which, through their presence, acknowledged Leonard as the figurehead of the outdoor movement. The Association established the practice of providing simple, affordable and non-exclusive accommodation, thus promoting greater access to the countryside, laid the foundations of the spirit of fellowship that characterises walking and rambling, and welcomed women on a basis of equality. It also offers an excellent example, within a leisure context, of what Jose Harris (1994) has described as the growth of associational culture in the late Victorian era, for in addition to pioneering holidays in the countryside it also promoted the development of rambling as a weekend leisure occupation and facilitated a diverse programme of urban leisure activity through local CHA clubs.

In terms of countryside leisure practice, its legacy lay not in footpath preservation nor in increased land access, but in its promotion of a cultural context, a phenomenon widely acknowledged as a powerful determinant of people's attitudes to the countryside as a leisure space (Aitchison, 2000; Miller et al., 2001; Parker and Ravenscroft, 1999). Its ideology and behavioural code reflected its approach to the countryside not as an untamed wilderness, as

in North America, nor as a pre-romantic uncivilised remote, but as a place of rich symbolic identity formed through a mixture of non-conformist morality with the liberal critique of industrial capitalism. Wordsworth, Arnold, Ruskin and Morris were each, in varying degrees, seeking an alternative model of society, and formulated a vision of a utopian pastoral commonwealth in which the romanticised ideals and values of pre-industrial society would be the defining characteristics. Leonard sought to create a microcosm of such a society through the leisure experience of a CHA holiday. Whereas the Victorian middle classes had arrived, through the prism of Romanticism, at a visual but passive interpretation of the landscape, the CHA sought to apply the romantic ideal, as reworked by mid-Victorian cultural critics, to the active recreational use of the countryside. The type of leisure it promoted was thus grounded upon a rejection of materialism, conspicuous consumption and rowdy behaviour in favour of simplicity, affordability and a sober, interpretative and quiet enjoyment of the countryside that later provided a foundation for the unwritten behavioural codes of countryside leisure practice. This pragmatic approach proved to be durable and informed the mid-twentieth century legislation on access and recreation which made the countryside more accessible to urban populations in order that its so-called “natural” beauty, which was in fact highly socially and culturally structured, might be enjoyed by all (Joad, 1938, 1946; MacEwen, 1982). In summation, the countryside was formulated as a space of quiet and reflective leisure that was antithetical to and opposite to the city, material consumption and commercialism, and one which was socially inclusive, free of access and a celebration of the moral and cultural symbolism of the pastoral landscape.

## References

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Walker of Almondsbury, Huddersfield, for allowing me access to the archives of the Huddersfield CHA Rambling Club and for sharing with me their knowledge and experience of the CHA. The arguments developed above remain, however, my own.

### Abbreviations

CHA Co-operative Holidays Association

NHRU National Home Reading Union

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